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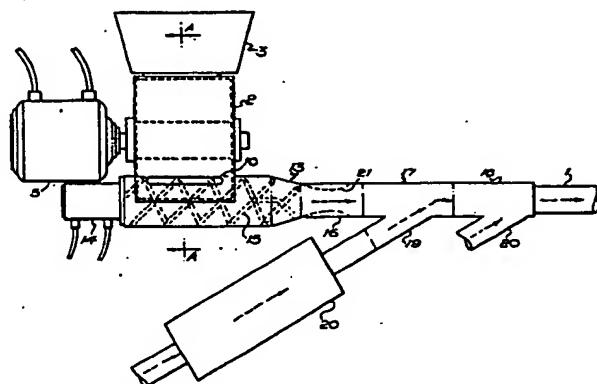
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(54) **Blast cleaning.**

(57) In contrast with the known method of cleansing surfaces by the projection of sand particles in an air stream against the surface, the present invention proposes to project particles of ice or other frozen liquid at the surface with the result that the spent particles will thereafter melt at the ambient temperature and be readily removed from the site and separated, if necessary, from contaminants dislodged from the surface.

Apparatus according to the invention comprises means (2, 3, 5, 13-16, 21) for the introduction of ice particles continuously into a stream of pressurised air (20), preferably mixed with water (19, 20). The means may comprise a plurality of containers (20), each successively passing between a position where they receive ice particles from a supply and a position where they release the particles to the stream.



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Blast Cleaning

The invention relates to blast cleaning, particularly
05 but not exclusively of surfaces contaminated by
radioactive substances.

The technology of wet blast cleaning of surfaces of
industrial and other plant, equipment and buildings
10 using sand or other inorganic particulate materials as
abradants has been developed to a stage where
considerable cleansing effect can be accomplished with
a minimum of abradant. When the contaminants to be
removed are non-hazardous, this quantity of abradant
15 presents no significant problem; if this is of sand,
for example, it is inexpensive and relatively easy to
dispose of. However, when hazardous contaminants such
as radioactive substances are involved and stringent
precautions have to be taken in the disposal of the
20 abradant, even the minimum quantities referred to
present considerable difficulties, and the present
invention is concerned at least in part in reducing
those difficulties.

25 According to one aspect of the invention there is
provided a method of removing contaminants from a
surface comprising propelling particles of frozen
liquid at the surface. The particles are preferably
propelled in or alongside a fluid stream. The stream
30 may be of air, preferably mixed with water, and it may
be propelled from a nozzle at a pressure greater than
atmospheric.

35 Preferably the frozen liquid is ice and the method is
such as to allow the ice particles to be transferred
from a supply into the stream substantially in a
continuous flow. The air may be cooled and dried, and

the water may be mixed with antifreeze or corrosion inhibitor or both before making contact with the ice. Before leaving the nozzle, the air and water may be at a pressure in the range 10 to 250 p.s.i.g. and 05 preferably between 20 p.s.i.g. and 160 p.s.i.g.

According to a further aspect of the invention there is provided apparatus for removal of contaminants from surfaces comprising means for producing ice particles, 10 means for introducing the particles into a fluid stream and means for conveying the stream to the surface.

Preferably the stream conveying means comprise means for pressurising a body of fluid, and pipe means 15 terminating in a nozzle for projecting the fluid in a jet. The ice introduction means may comprise an auger and, furthermore, preferably comprise at least one container arranged for receiving a quantity of ice from a supply and subsequently releasing the said ice to the 20 introduction means.

Preferably the said at least one container is arranged to be closed to the ice supply when it is open to the introduction means. The apparatus preferably 25 comprises a plurality of containers, each passing in turn from a first position open only to the ice supply for receiving ice, to a second position open only to the introduction means for releasing ice therefrom. Each container may subsequently pass to a third 30 position for discharging any ice not released to the introduction means.

Embodiments of the invention will now be described by way of example and with reference to the accompanying 35 drawings, of which:-

Fig. 1 is a schematic side elevation of an ice jet

blast cleaning apparatus; and

Fig. 2 is a section on line II-II of Fig. 1.

05 Sand or other mineral particulate solids have conventionally been used in blast cleaning, including wet blast cleaning, and the problems of dust and of the removal of the used abradant have been accepted hitherto as unavoidable and quite acceptable in view of
10 the relative cheapness of the material. Indeed the disposal of the spent sand presents no significant difficulties when the cleaning is of surfaces contaminated with non-hazardous materials, but where extremely hazardous materials are concerned as in the
15 refurbishing of nuclear installations, for example, the question of the disposal of the abradant becomes more serious because during the cleaning operation the contaminants are removed from the original surfaces and become admixed with the abradant. In the
20 circumstances where radioactive materials are concerned, the contaminated abradant has to be handled with extreme care and disposed of under strictly controlled conditions. The difficulty and expense of such disposal completely overrides the convenience and
25 cheapness of sand as abradant.

It has now been discovered that, with a suitable adaptation of the conventional blast cleaning equipment, hard ice particles may be used as abradant
30 in dry and wet blast cleaning with the considerable advantage that the spent abradant will eventually melt and the contaminants may then be separated by filtration so that the resultant and relatively harmless filtrate may be readily disposed of.

35 Apparatus for use in connection with the method outlined above is shown in the figures and consists of

a pressure hose 1 leading to a nozzle (not shown), to which hose compressed air, ice particles and optionally water are introduced to provide a fluid stream which issues from the nozzle in a jet.

05

The ice particles are produced by the use of a standard ice maker. This may be of drum and blade scraper configuration so as to produce particles of substantially regular size. As will be explained 10 below, it is important that as far as possible the ice particles once formed shall not remain stationary and in contact with one another in case they begin to cohere under the influence of gravity. In an effort to maintain the separateness of the individual 15 crystals, they are subjected to further cooling after production.

After cooling the particles are fed by gravity into a charging chamber via a chute 3. The charging chamber 20 2 consists of a cylindrical shell 4 and a rotor axially arranged within the shell and driven at controllable speed by suitable means such as an electric motor 5.

The rotor comprises a cylindrical core 6 from which a 25 plurality of blades 7 project radially so as to contact the inner surface of the shell 4. According to requirements the blades may be fixed or spring loaded and the materials of construction of the blades and of the shell may be selected so that the blades form an 30 effective pressure seal against the shell 4.

The shell 4 is provided with an inlet port 8 located below the chute 3 as well as outlet ports 9 and 10.

35 As the rotor is driven, in a clockwise direction as shown in Fig. 2, the blades 7 define, with the core 6 and the shell 4 a plurality of chambers which move

cyclically between ports 8, 9 and 10.

The outlet opening 9 is arranged in alignment with the inlet opening 11 in the casing 12 of an auger 13. The 05 auger is driven by a variable speed electric motor 14, and the auger screw 15 is so constructed in relation to the direction of rotation of the motor 14 that material entering into the casing 12 will be forced thereby towards the hose 1.

10

Between the hose 1 and the auger 13 there are a series of pipe elements 16, 17 and 18. Pipe element 17 has a branch 19 which is connected to a source of high pressure air (not shown) such as a conventional 15 compressor unit operating in a pressure range between 10 and 250 p.s.i.g. and with a flow rate of between 50 and 500 cubic feet per minute. An air cooling and drying unit 20 is introduced into the air line between the source and the branch 19.

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Pipe section 18 similarly has a branch 20 which leads to a source of water at a pressure in the range 10 to 250 p.s.i.g. and a valve, not shown, capable of adjusting the rate of flow of water into the pipe 18 25 from zero to twelve gallons per minute.

As shown in Fig. 1 the branch 19 is at an acute angle to the axis of the pipe element 17 so that air from the high pressure source is directed towards the hoze 1.

30 The flow of air from the branch towards the hose tends to cause a suction effect on the auger side of the pipe 17, and this effect is enhanced by providing pipe section 16 with an internal Venturi surface 21.

35 In use of the apparatus, ice particles produced by the ice maker and subsequently cooled are fed via the chute 3 so that they drop into one of the compartments in the

- charging chamber 2 defined between two blades 7. As the rotor is rotated at controlled speed within the shell 4 the chamber is closed by both blades 7 moving in sealed relationship with the inner surface of the
- 05 shell until the leading blade passes the opening 9 when the ice particles, or some of them, fall under gravity through the opening 11 in the casing 12 of the augur 13.
- 10 The augur is being driven by the motor 14 and the ice particles are conveyed thereby towards the pipe element 16. During this period compressed, cooled and dried air is being introduced into the pipe element 17 via the branch 19 towards the hose 1, and the pitot effect
- 15 of the air flow is such that, urged also by the augur 13, the ice particles are drawn into the air stream. Within the pipe element 18 the air stream loaded with ice particles is admixed as required with water which has also been suitably cooled and as required mixed
- 20 with antifreeze or cleanser, for clearing the hose 1, and corrosion inhibitor.

The high pressure mixture of air, ice particles and optionally water is conveyed along the hose 1 to the

25 nozzle whence it is discharged at the surface to be cleansed of its contamination. Provided that due precautions have been made to preserve the low temperature of the ice particles, such as by suitable lagging of the augur and pipe elements and hose, the

30 particles reaching the surface will be sufficiently hard and sharp and particularly by virtue of the air pressure will have sufficient kinetic energy as to dislodge contaminants from the surface in essentially the same way as does sand in a conventional blast

35 cleaning operation. Unlike sand, however, the ice particles will melt sooner or later so that the removal of the dislodged contaminants becomes relatively easily

effected by filtration from the water.

It will be understood from the description of the charging chamber 2 that as each compartment defined by
5 an adjacent pair of blades 7 moves away from the inlet opening 8. another such compartment takes its place so that while ever the rotor is turning and ice is being fed to the chute 3. a continuous supply of ice will be presented to the augur. If. in spite of the control
10 of the speed of both the augur and of the rotor. ice is presented to the augur at a faster rate than it can advance towards the hose 1. so that a compartment still contains ice after it has passed the opening 9. the remaining ice is discharged from the opening 10 into
15 chute 22. The material discharged from the chute 22 is conveniently returned to the ice making machine.

Again. if ice is produced by the ice making machine at a faster rate than can be accommodated by the passage
20 of successive empty compartments under the chute 3. excess ice will be directed away from the charging chamber and returned again to the ice making machine rather than to interrupt the flow of ice through the chute which could result in the particles sticking
25 together.

When sand is used as an abradant in blast cleaning dust from fine particles can cause a significant problem. and one of the objects of introducing water into the
30 fluid stream is to eliminate dust. It is likely in the operation of the present invention that dust will not present a problem and it may not be necessary to introduce water. but the apparatus described provides the facility for introducing water if required. Whilst
35 the invention has a particular application in treating surfaces contaminated with radioactive substances. it is also of great value in the cleansing of buildings on

account of the absence of dust. the reduced damage to the surface below the contaminant layer. and the fact that the spent particles of the abradant melt at ambient temperature and can readily be washed away down
05 existing drains.

Whilst the invention has been described above as using ice as the abradant. it is to be understood that the ice could be replaced by other frozen liquid provided
10 that the solid form is sufficiently abrasive and melts at ambient temperature.

As an alternative to propelling the particles in a fluid stream. they may be propelled mechanically. for
15 example by the use of a centrifugal bladed-wheel blasting machine of known type. In this event it is preferable that a fluid stream be projected at the surface alongside or following the propelled particles in order to rinse away dislodged contaminants.
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CLAIMS

- 1 A method of removing contaminants from a surface comprising propelling particles of frozen liquid at the surface.
- 2 A method according to Claim 1 in which the particles are
05 propelled in a fluid stream.
- 3 A method according to Claim 2 wherein the stream is propelled from a nozzle at a pressure greater than atmospheric.
- 4 A method according to Claim 2 or Claim 3 wherein particles are transferred from a supply into the stream substantially in a
10 continuous flow.
- 5 A method according to any preceding Claim wherein the stream is of air.
- 6 A method according to Claim 5 wherein the air stream is mixed with water.
15
- 7 A method according to Claim 6 wherein the air is cooled and dried, and the water is mixed with antifreeze or corrosion inhibitor or both before making contact with the particles.
- 8 A method according to any preceding Claim wherein, before leaving the nozzle, the air and water are at a pressure in the
20 range 10 to 250 p.s.i.g. and preferably between 20 p.s.i.g. and 160 p.s.i.g.
- 9 Apparatus for removal of contaminants from surfaces comprising means for producing particles of frozen liquid, means for introducing the particles into a fluid stream and means for conveying the stream to the surface.

10 Apparatus according to Claim 9 wherein the stream conveying means comprise means for pressurising a body of fluid, and pipe means terminating in a nozzle for projecting the fluid in a jet.

05

11 Apparatus according to Claim 8 wherein the particle introduction means comprise an auger.

12 Apparatus according to Claim 9 or Claim 10 wherein the particle introduction means comprise at least one container
10 arranged for receiving a quantity of particles from a supply and subsequently releasing the said particles to the introduction means.

13 Apparatus according to Claim 12 wherein the said at least one container is arranged to be closed to the particle supply when it is open to the introduction means.

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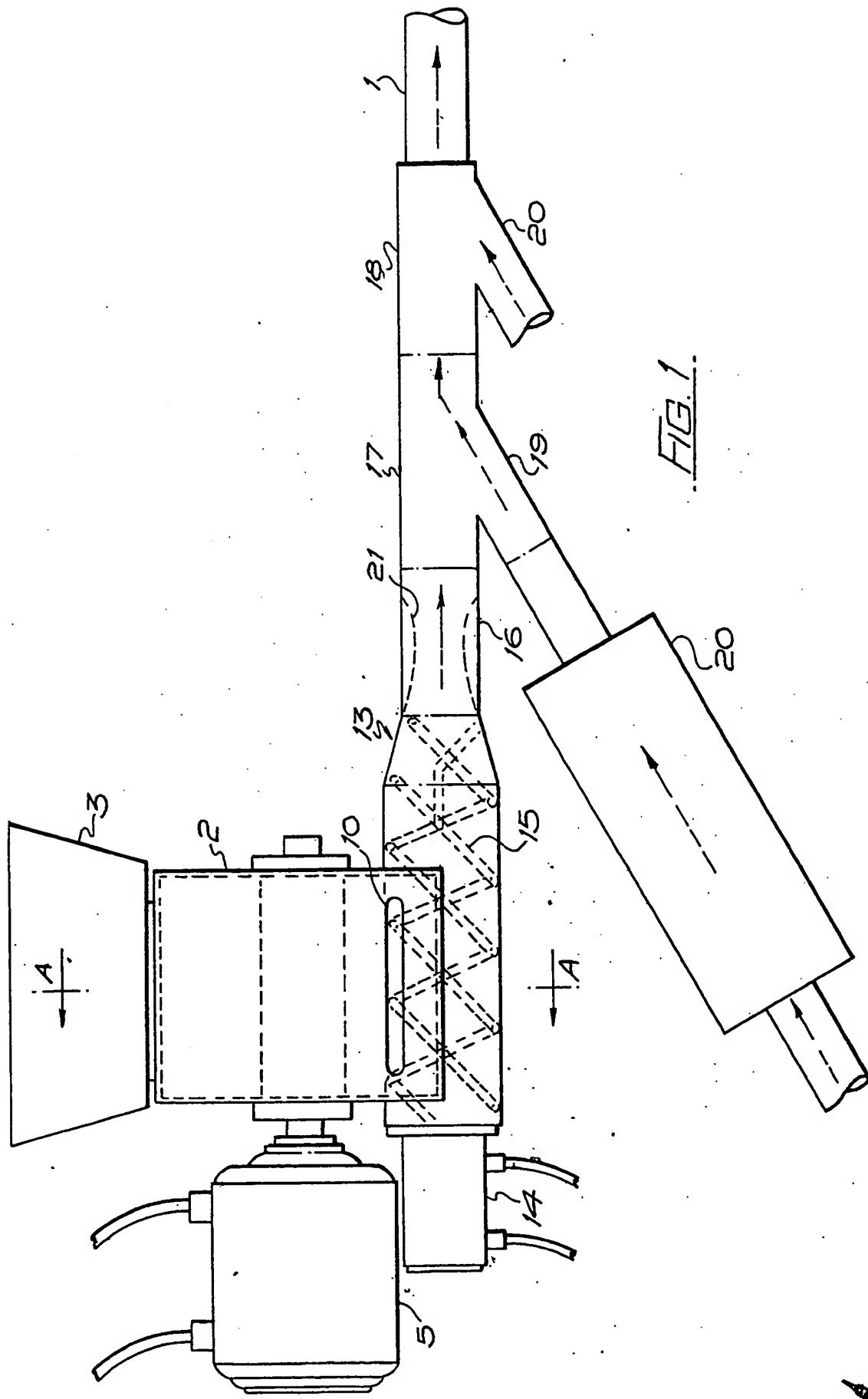
14 Apparatus according to Claim 12 or Claim 13 comprising a plurality of containers, each passing in turn from a first position open only to the said supply for receiving particles, to a second position open only to the introduction means for releasing particles therefrom.

20 15 Apparatus according to Claim 14 wherein each container subsequently passes to a third position for discharging any particles not released to the introduction means.

16 A method according to any of Claims 1 to 8 wherein the frozen liquid is ice.

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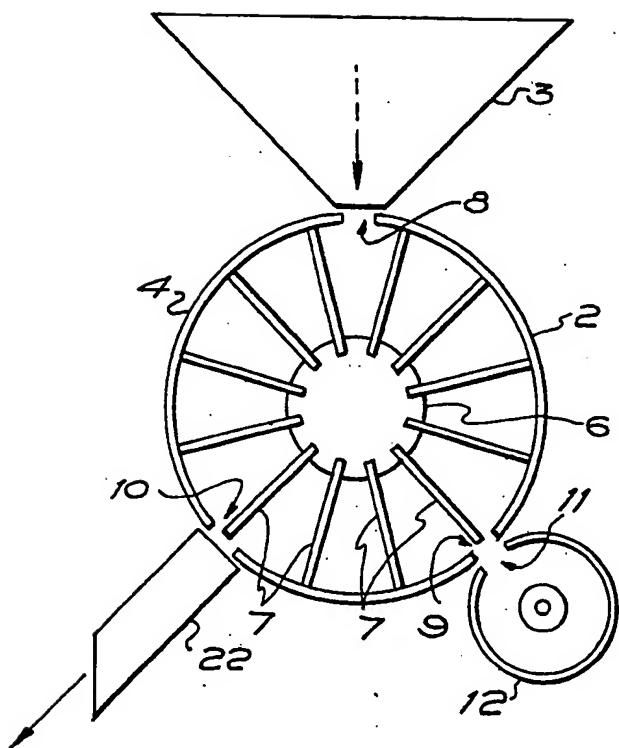


FIG. 2



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Application number

EP 86 30 1479

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.4)
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.4)
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X	GB-A-1 538 433 (LONG & CO., LTD.) * Claims 1,2,5,9,10; page 1, lines 35-43 *	1-4, 6, 7	
X	DE-A-2 638 323 (WACKER-CHEMIE GmbH) * Claims *	1-6, 8	
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search		Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE		23-05-1986	ESCHBACH D.P.M.
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS			
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THE HAGUE	23-05-1986	ESCHBACH D.P.M.	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	
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